2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5

extended to his brothers' sons, especially if their father was dead. Following the same pattern, a man's sons who were away at work sent back money to their father who bought cattle with it, or spent it as the sons asked. It was clear in the 1930's that Ngoni men rarely sent money directly to their wives, though they frequently asked their father to give money to their wives and to buy for them cloth or needed household equipment.

Within the larger orbit of the male family responsibilities women had their more restricted but clearly defined sphere. At a woman's confinement she was looked after by her husband's own mother, aided by his other mothers and by his sisters if they were present in the village. At the 'coming out' of the new member of the family, ten to fourteen days after birth, the woman and the baby, bathed and ritually cleansed, were seated on a mat outside the hut and presented to the male members of the father's family who gave small gifts to the baby. If it was a boy, the father's mother generally carried it to the gate of the kraal where the men were sitting, to present it to them as one who would eventually herd the cattle. On this occasion, or soon after, the child's name was chosen, usually by the father's father, who prepared and gave to the mother a calf-skin or goat-skin for carrying the child in. The meat of the animal was cooked by the father's mother and a small feast was held for the father's mothers, sisters, brothers and their wives, and any others of the father's family who had helped in the confinement.[1] After the child had thus been acknowledged in its father's family circle, the mother took the baby to visit her own family, who also gave it presents.

During the rearing of the child, its father's female relatives assumed responsibility for giving the young mother advice. The father's mother was expected to note the stage at which the child should be weaned, always if possible before the mother's next pregnancy. If the father's mother was unobservant, the other senior women of the husband's family would rebuke her and say 'Look now you are foolish because the child has been endangered. You are like an enemy to it.' These women then took the initiative and insisted on weaning the child. They said to the baby's mother 'We want to wean the child.' They made a paste of ground chillies and put it on the mother's breasts and covered them with a skin or cloth. The child was taken from her after it had tried to suck and had been refused, and given to the father's mother or sister, who looked after it with the help of a nursemaid. It was fed on cow's milk, *amasi* (milk curds), and gruel.

The publicity given to the weaning and the initiative taken by the senior women of the husband's family were intended to inform others in the village that the parents were now free to have another child. This was one aspect of the old Ngoni form of family planning and, in describing

[1] This fine was also held when a carrying cloth was given instead of a skin.

III

'A New Stranger has come'

In these words the father's mother announced from the door of the hut that a child had been born. From inside the hut the women assisting the mother at the time of delivery had given a single cry if it was a boy and two cries for a girl. If the birth had been delayed till late afternoon towards sunset, the women in the hut said to the mother, if it was a boy: 'See the baby has been awaiting the return of the cattle, because it is he who will tend the cattle.'

The new baby was at first regarded as a stranger, born by a woman who had herself come to the village as a stranger when she married. In later years, when speaking of his parents, the child would say: 'X is my father, and I am of the womb of A, and G and H they are my brother and my sister of one womb.' This particularisation of a full brother and sister was used to correct the extended use of the kinship terms, and also to convey the idea that having been born from the womb of one woman gave children a special relationship important in Ngoni thinking.

Preparation for birth

When an Ngoni wife was aware that she was pregnant she did not say anything to her husband, and indeed endeavoured to conceal her condition from him as long as possible, continuing the normal sleeping arrangements and intercourse. Ngoni women liked to assert their authority and ascendancy on those occasions, and therefore excluded the men from knowledge of the coming event and from all preparations for it. The senior women used to say, 'Men are

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

because it was implied that her family had not given her good instruction and advice before marriage. 843 152

The birth of the child

When the senior women were satisfied that labour was about to begin, they took charge of all the preparations. They first sent out of the hut all the things belonging to the husband, his clothes, axes, spears, shields, and all the good mats, pots and baskets. Only old mats and clothes and pots were used during labour, and the hut was henceforth unclean and forbidden to the husband and to all males. The mother-in-law directed operations, with the help of her co-wives, the wives of her husband's brothers, widowed sisters of her husband, and some of the wives of the younger generation. The women who took an active part in the actual delivery were the older ones, but several younger women came to assist, or look on, and to encourage the young wife. 844 [422] [846]

She was made to sit on a mat leaning back against the knees of another woman, and the experienced 'midwives' were in front to receive the child in their hands. She was told to bear down and sometimes given a bark rope tied to the rafters to pull on. Though she might be in great pain, she was not expected to cry out or even to groan. The older women talked to her encouragingly, and wiped her face, or gave her a little water to drink. After the birth, the woman knelt forward leaning on her hands until the placenta was born. It was buried in a hole, in the floor at the back of the hut on the women's side.

The baby was washed by a senior woman and oiled with castor oil. The cord was tied with thread and the baby was given very thin gruel made of finger millet fried and ground. This was intended to act as a purgative to get rid of the mucus in the stomach. After this had been ejected, a tiny bit of the sour milk curds was put in the baby's mouth. [853]

The mother was washed and covered with a cloth and left to rest, while the women folded up the delivery mat

844 ready for burning, and generally cleaned up. The fire in the middle of the hut was rekindled to warm the mother and [262] baby, and gruel was given to the mother of millet flour, brought from the mother-in-law's hut where it had been cooked. With the help of the other women, the mother [853] washed her breasts with warm water and massaged them to make the milk flow, ready for the child to suck.

845 The other ethnic groups surrounding the Ngoni in Nyasa-land considered it disastrous if a child was born face down [184] or with the buttocks first, and twins were dreaded as ill omens. The Ngoni shared none of these beliefs and were particularly considerate for the mother of twins, often killing [262] a beast to give the mother meat and broth to increase her [853] flow of milk. The only notice the Ngoni took of the method of presentation at birth was that they gave a child a name [553] indicative of such a birth. They gave special names for the first and second twin born. If one twin died it was buried under the veranda of the hut and a smooth stone was placed [766] on top. This stone was used for sitting on, and the surviving twin was held on it when being washed.

Ritual and social uncleanness

846 From the time just before the birth took place the hut and 783 everything in it, and the woman and her new baby, were considered ritually unclean. If she had to leave the hut to answer the call of nature, she covered herself with a cloth from head to foot and avoided meeting anyone. She did no cooking herself until the ritual uncleanness was removed. Food was brought to her from her mother-in-law's hut or from her co-wives' huts, a special dish was used and washed separately, and she did not use her hands to eat with but a wooden spoon which was also washed separately. During the period of seclusion within the hut one of the senior women who helped at the birth slept in the hut with the mother and baby. No other young children were allowed to sleep in the hut, though they might come in to see the baby. All rules

CHILDREN OF THEIR FATHERS

591 184 844 Changes in residence at and after marriage influenced the composition of the group of relatives who assisted at births. In the central kingdom daughters of leading men in the village often stayed in their father's village at marriage. Hence the father's sisters were often present at the birth and the wife's mother and her sisters might be living in the village. If the [614] wife belonged to a higher ranking Ngoni clan than her husband, her relatives shared responsibility with those of the husband's family.

177 844 [759] As may be imagined the struggle between mother-in-law control and western medical practices at childbirth was a protracted one. Even when there was a younger member of the husband's family trained as a nurse or midwife, she by no means had her way in organizing the conduct of the birth. She might introduce a few hygienic measures such as clean cloths instead of old rags, and sterilized thread for tying the cord. But unless the senior women were frightened, and they seldom were, by prolonged and difficult labour, the Ngoni families were averse to taking a young mother into hospital. [606] The chief reason was the challenge to the authority of the mother-in-law, especially when the younger women who had some knowledge of western medical practices questioned the advice of the senior women.

4: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949)1951 FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

two groups of relatives. In the partial destruction of the father-in-law's crop by the man's friends, the latent hostility between the two groups is canalized into a form that is just socially acceptable. In the later stages of hoeing the men and women in the party act wildly, dance round and round anyone who tries to interfere with them and throw earth all over them. At first all contact between the father-in-law and the leader of the party is through intermediaries, and if all goes well, and there is no crisis, the father-in-law will always remain in the background. But with rising tempers the tension increases, and the father-in-law may himself go to cajole and threaten the party. When they do decide to stop and go into the village, an attempt is made to establish peaceful relations again, and the leader of the party begins to protest that they never really intended holding out for such a large present, that they knew it was getting dark and that they could not hoe at night. They settle down to drink the beer provided by the father-in-law and in the morning go back to their own village. It is significant that the man himself cannot be the leader of the party, so that he does not come into direct contact with his father-in-law. He shelters behind the party leader, so that the chances of an open breach between him and his father-in-law are lessened.

The formalized expression of hostility, which is a feature of many Ngoni ceremonials,[18] appears most clearly in marriage in the custom of the hoeing party, but is present in some other situations, as in the instruction of the bride at the gall bladder ceremony, when she is sometimes told she has a bad character, is mean and deceitful. Even the carrying of beer can be used to express hostility, as is indicated by Reuben's remark towards the end of his son-in-law's hoeing party, that he would tell his wife to brew beer and send it to his son-in-law's village, where the women bringing beer would demand a present even greater than the one demanded by the leader of the hoers.[19]

Men and women wish their daughters to bear children, and are reluctant to marry them to impotent men. Yet childbirth is hazardous, and a woman may die in labour because of her adultery or the adultery of her husband. It is important, therefore, that a woman's parents should be informed whenever she becomes pregnant, lest the woman die and her parents hear of her death without being forewarned of the danger. It is not sufficient that the woman's parents should hear from others that their daughter is pregnant. She must go to them on a special visit to tell them the news herself. This formal notification takes place every time she is pregnant, but if, when she becomes pregnant for the first time, she is living in

[18] For another example, see the installation of the headman's deputy described in Gluckman, Mitchell and Barnes, 'The village headman in British Central Africa', *Africa*, xix (1949), pp. 100-108.
[19] See Appendix III, p. 151.

4: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949)1951 FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

her husband's village, the occasion must be recognized in a more elaborate manner. Her husband or his relatives buy her a new cloth. Wearing this cloth she stands at the door of her husband's hut, and is undressed by her husband's grandmother. The old woman rubs castor oil on her abdomen and dresses her again. A small girl from her husband's kin goes with her to her own village, and their arrival there, with the woman dressed in her new cloth, indicates formally to her parents that she is pregnant. They stay at the woman's village for about a week, and then return to her husband's village.[14] Her parents have thus been made socially aware of her pregnancy, and the man can legitimately look to them for help if she becomes ill or fractious.

If the woman does die in childbirth, her husband has to offer a beast to her parents even though they were told of her pregnancy.[15] The husband may confess to adultery when called upon to do so by the midwife, but this does not absolve him from the obligation to pay the beast. Confession absolves him from the charge of having caused the death of his wife by his careless behaviour, but he must still recompense his parents-in-law for the death of their daughter. It is recognized that a woman may die in childbirth despite the absence of adultery during pregnancy or despite full confession of adultery by both the woman and her husband. She dies just because God lets her die, and not because of any human misconduct. Yet she reaches the situation in which there is the danger of death because of her position as the wife of her husband. It is the 'work' of married women to bear children, and it is the 'work' of the husband if his wife dies in childbirth to offer a beast to her parents so that they may mourn their daughter.

5. Quarrels

We see then that a woman is not severed utterly from her own group when she marries, but that her kinsfolk retain an interest in her welfare and have certain rights in her and in her husband. The recognition of these rights by their son-in-law increases his esteem in their eyes, and enables him to appeal to them with confidence when he needs their support. The common interest of all is in the successful maintenance of the marriage, and the mutual recognition of rights and fulfilment of obligations consolidate the social relationships established between people related by marriage. Quarrels threaten the continued existence of the marriage, and it is therefore in the common interest that they should be settled as expeditiously as possible. The intervention of affines in a personal quarrel between husband and wife is characteristic of a system in which most neighbours are kinsfolk and in which the spatial concentration of people into compact villages, where abuse shouted at one

[14] This ceremony is called *ngoyi*, which means 'breast-cloth' in Nsenga.
[15] See above, pp. 39f.

6:Rattray E,G-5 (ca. 1900) 1907 FR5 Ngoni FR5

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[837]

will finish the ceremony [that the relish may be given out]. Should the girl, before she came to maturity, not have been betrothed to any man, the matrons tell her she must go to some lover; this is known as "chigango." In the evening she takes her cooking pot and relish and goes to the quarters of the young unmarried men, who for the night sleep somewhere else. In the morning the girl goes back to the Kuku hut.

V

THE BIRTH OF A CHILD

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1. When a woman becomes pregnant, the matrons of the village tell the husband "he must now no longer cohabit with her." If the man have another wife he goes off to her house. When the time draws near for the woman's accouchement, she bids her husband leave her. He goes to one of the village matrons and tells her, "My wife is very ill." Then old women go to the hut and begin to take out all the cooking utensils and household goods. Should the woman have difficulty in giving birth the old women bid her confess, saying, "Speak, child, lest you die; who committed adultery with you?" Should she have been faithless she confesses, saying, "I sinned with so and so." The matrons hide such confessions. When she is safely delivered they bathe the infant, then one old woman goes off to tell the husband, "Your wife is well." Perhaps the woman has given birth to a male child, then she tells him, "You have seen a knobkerry."

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[845]

6:Rattray E, G-5 (ca. 1900) 1907 FR5 Ngoni FR5

If a female child, "You have seen a basket." Then the man comes and sits down on the verandah and makes fire. The old fire in the hut is thrown away. The old woman takes up the new fire and kindles with it a new fire in the hut. The husband goes away to another hut. He does not now cohabit with any of his other wives until his wife, who was confined, is seen again in public.

II. When they know the umbilical cord is going to break, when they set the infant on the knees (legs), they lay it on its side so that when the cord breaks it will fall on one side; for if it breaks and falls on the pubes the child will be impotent, or barren. The umbilical cord they bury on the verandah. That day is the one on which they shave the mother and child. They begin with the infant and they shave the mother. On shaving the infant's head they leave a little hair on the fontanel, and should the infant be of the clan *Maseko*, they also leave a little patch on the back of the head, and then his godmother gives the child a name, saying, "My grandchild's name is so and so." This name it will have until such time as it begins to laugh and notice people, then the father, should he wish, will give the child another name. When it grows up still farther it will give itself a name, saying, "Now I am so and so." When the child becomes a man he will once again discard his old name and take another. And if a person calls him by the old name, he says, "He has named me by that thing the wild bush-pigs unearth while digging with their tusks" [meaning something very old]. When they have finished the shaving, the child's grandmother powders some medicine called *pfundabwe*, this she mixes with castor oil and red clay, and then rubs on the fontanel. This medicine they continually renew. When the infant gets strong and big they stop. The

4: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1909) 1910 FT7 Yao
Marovi FR4
Ngoni FR5

The placenta is buried in a refuse heap,[1] outside whence it is sometimes said M 844
to be stolen by *mpáiti* (evil spirits) to make medicine. A caul is known, and now M
is said to be caused by the father continually wearing a hat. It is not kept for [845]
any purpose, as far as I know. If a woman die with the child unborn the child is M
cut out through the abdomen, when the body is in the grave, and the two bodies [766]
then buried together, the reason given being that if this is not done many other
women would die in the same way. Cæsarian section is never performed; a still- M
born child is buried in the refuse heap; there is no treatment for still-birth.[2] [845]
Miscarriage is said to be common. Post-partum hæmorrhage is said to be one of
the frequent causes of death.

After the confinement the whole body is washed, and then a piece of burning M
wood is placed between the legs of the woman and allowed to smoulder for several [783]
hours; this as a means of purification.

The woman stays in the house for a week. She does not resume sexual M 846
intercourse with her husband for two years unless she is the only wife, when six
months to one year is allowed to elapse, though she cohabits after one or two
weeks. During the puerperium there is no special diet. The child is suckled for M 853
two to three years by mother, or grandmother if the former die; or if neither are
available, by the aunt (maternal). Death of the child may ensue as the result of M
being suckled by others. Suckling sometimes prolonged for four years, belief [842]
holding that thereby pregnancy is prevented.

After miscarriage the woman remains in the house only two days, but has to M 845
take medicine for six months, abstaining from sexual intercourse for half that
period. Medicine is frequently taken to cause abortion, and may be made by one
person to affect another; it is taken when a period is missed. Sterility is said M 847
to be common among women. No artificial sterility is produced, but medicine is M
taken and a cord run round the loins to prevent pregnancy supervening. The new- 844
born child is first washed in ordinary water and then in the water in which a man
and his wife have washed after coitus. After this the other women may touch the M
baby, but not young girls, otherwise it might die. If it die before it has left the 766
house it would be buried by women just as a still-born child, the men refusing to
assist. After the cord has separated (one week) the child and mother leave the M
house and appear in public. The child's head is oiled this day and sometimes 846
medicine made of charcoal is pasted on with some beads as a preventive against 302
injury by the strong sun.[3] 751

The child is named usually after the maternal uncle's child-name which is M
given by the uncle (Nyau). 551

[1] In an Angoni village a woman I saw buried the placenta under the floor of the hut, using M 751
a hoe to dig with, upon which she first milked her breasts—the first milk. This to prevent 844
abscess in the gland.

[2] With still-birth, women accuse their husbands of having syphilis, and "a child is often M 845
born with sores on it."

[3] Medicine called *Ifyembelwa*, see p. 286.